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THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
PLAINS OF ABRAHAM

ADDRESS DELIVERED

BY THE

HON. GEO. W. ROSS,

Before the Canadian Club of Hamilton, April 27th, 1908.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN:—

His Excellency, the Governor-General of Canada, has suggested that in conjunction with the celebration of the tercentenary of the City of Quebec it would be a fitting thing to provide for the conversion of the Plains of Abraham into a national park in memory of Montcalm and Wolfe and of that decisive battle with which their fame and the destiny of Canada are inseparably associated. The suggestion is a most worthy one—worthy of the distinguished representative of His Majesty with whom it originated and worthy of the occasion which it is designed to commemorate.

I propose, as a small contribution to the interest which His Excellency's suggestion has aroused, asking your attention to the historical significance of that event to Canada, to America and to Great Britain.

As to Canada the first consideration is that a partnership was formed on the Plains of Abraham between two great world races in the occupation and development of French America. True, the partnership was not a voluntary one in the first instance. For many years there was great uncertainty as to its practicability and permanence, yet from the first, both parties to the compact evinced a desire to conduct the partnership on friendly and equal terms, and where friction occurred as to methods of business (and that was not infrequent in its early history) to vary such methods where possible, without prejudice to the ultimate success of the partnership.

The articles of partnership were formally signed on the Plains of Abraham outside the City of Quebec on the 18th September, 1759, and went into immediate effect. But the business of the senior member of the firm dates from a much earlier day and began in this way. In 1535 Jacques Cartier started out to explore the wilds of America, sailed up the St. Lawrence and took possession of everything in sight for the use and benefit of the King of France.

A few years later Champlain, another explorer and agent of the King of France, went still further west, ascended the Ottawa River some two hundred miles and crossed the Height

of Land to the Georgian Bay, and on one of his voyages founded the City of Quebec. Then La Salle, the most daring of all, crossed by way of the Illinois River and down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, and Verandrye, another explorer, traversed the continent as far as the Rocky Mountains. So persistent and extensive were these explorations that before the middle of the 18th century the King of France claimed nearly the whole of North America by right of discovery.

But in those days it was one thing to discover unoccupied territory and quite another thing to settle and protect it. Owing to the hostile attitude of the Indians and the fear that at any moment Great Britain might dispute its right to the lands so discovered, the French Government was obliged to devote its attention to the erection of forts for self protection rather than to the settlement of its possessions and the cultivation of the soil. It was on this account that Louisburg, on Cape Breton Island, and Quebec, the gateway to the Western possessions, were so strongly garrisoned and fortified. For internal protection military posts were established along the lakes, beginning with Fort Frontenac at the entrance to Lake Ontario and Fort Niagara at its western extremity, with other forts at Detroit, Mackinac and at different points along the Ohio, Illinois and the Mississippi Rivers.

For many years British statesmen felt that France had secured more than a fair share of the unoccupied lands of North America. Canada was the most valuable part of these possessions. To weaken France in America would weaken her prestige at home, and so Great Britain was prepared to attack Canada whenever the proper occasion arose. The Seven Years' War furnished the occasion, and William Pitt, England's great war minister, was not slow in using it. His first attack was upon Louisburg, at the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which was captured in 1758. Next year he mustered all his forces for the attack upon Canada.

The plan of campaign against Canada was to divide the French forces by an attack at three different points: By way of New York against the French forts on the Ohio; by way of Lake Champlain, to approach Quebec from the rear; and by way of the St. Lawrence to attack Quebec on the front. In this tripartite campaign about 60,000 men were engaged—the fleet and transports which carried them from Great Britain consisting of 277 ships of the line. By the capture of Fort Niagara in the west the French forces were prevented from coming to the relief of Quebec. The successful advance

through Lake Champlain opened the way to Montreal, and by the midsummer of 1759 Quebec alone remained, the only important fortress in the possession of the French.

It is not necessary for my purpose to enter into the details of the final struggle begun by Wolfe in the month of June and terminated by his victory and death on the 13th of September following. Nor need I attempt to describe the courage and heroism of Montcalm, whose fate in the defence of the possessions of the King of France was equally tragic. The end of the French régime had come and the partnership to which I referred in the opening of my remarks was about to begin.

On the defeat of Montcalm, Vaudrenil, the Governor, with the greater portion of the army encamped outside Quebec retreated about 12 miles distant, leaving De Ramezay with a small force in command within the city walls. De Ramezay soon found that the defence of the city was hopeless and could only result in loss of life and the destruction of property. But his honour as a soldier was involved and the citizens looked to him for safety and protection. Accordingly he drew up certain articles of surrender which he submitted to Generals Saunders and Townshend, who had succeeded to the command on the death of General Wolfe. In the first of these he claimed the "honours of war" for his little garrison of soldiers and sailors. The response was most cordial as well as magnanimous. "The garrison of the town, composed of land forces, marines and sailors, shall march out with their arms and baggage, drums beating, matches lighted, with two pieces of French cannon and twelve rounds for each piece and shall be embarked as conveniently as possible to be sent to the first port in France." What could be more generous? Quebec had fallen to be sure, but the brave men who defended her were permitted to march out of the city in all the "pomp and panoply of war" without any reflection upon their honour or their courage as soldiers of France.

Ramezay's next demand was that "the inhabitants be preserved in the possession of their houses, goods, effects and privileges." This, too, was granted on the one condition of their laying down their arms. What a contrast between the treatment accorded to the inhabitants of Quebec and that usually accorded the surrender of a fortress on the continent of Europe. Here there was no sacking of houses, no pillage or plunder of private property, but everyone was as secure in his possessions, goods, effects and privileges under the British flag as he was before Wolfe had mustered his forces on the Plains of Abraham.

Ramezay further asked that "The inhabitants shall not be called to account for having borne arms in defence of the town; that the effects of the absent officials and of the inhabitants shall not be touched, that they shall not be removed nor forced to leave their houses until a definitive treaty between His most Christian Majesty and His Britannic Majesty have settled their estates; that the sick and wounded shall be cared for and the chaplains and physicians protected; that soldiers be placed as safe-guards over the churches, the convents and the principal residences; that the artillery and ammunition shall be given up in good faith": all of which was conceded by the British Generals in the very words in which the request was made. There was no bargaining for better terms, no suspicion cast upon the good faith of Ramezay, by whom they were offered, and no qualifying acceptance of them by the other side. The British apparently recognized that in taking over the strongest fortress in America the goodwill of the people who defended it was quite as valuable as the fortress itself, and that in the moment of victory they could afford to accept an honourable surrender without any humiliating conditions.

Besides asking protection for the property and the citizens of Quebec, Ramezay asked that, "The exercise of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion should be preserved, that safe-guards should be given to the houses of the clergy, to the monasteries and convents, especially to His Lordship, the Bishop of Quebec, who desires to exercise freely and with the decency which his standing and the sacred mysteries of his religion require, his episcopal authority in the town of Quebec until the possession of Canada has been decided by treaty." Here, as in other cases, the response was cordial and the request granted "until the possession of Canada shall have been decided between their Britannic and Most Christian Majesties."

And now the last act in the long drama of French occupation and discovery and exploration is about to close. Ramezay, with his military staff, and bearing a flag of truce, marches from the citadel to the fateful plains where the British forces are encamped. The terms of capitulation which he proposed are read over one by one in the presence of the British officers in command (Oh, why has cruel fate prevented General James Wolfe from being present?) and attested in the following words: "The present treaty (not capitulation) has been made and executed in duplicate between us at the camp before Quebec this 18th day of September, 1759. Signed: Chas. Saunders, George Townsend, D^r Ramezay." And with these

significant words the City of Quebec passed over from the government of His Most Christian Majesty the King of France, to His Britannic Majesty of the United Kingdom, and with it practically the French colonial possessions in America.

A great philosopher has said that history is philosophy teaching by experience. Might we not also say that history is romance in concrete form—romance in which adventure and chivalry and heroism and tragedy are unmistakeably blended. What pen could describe the romantic side of the French régime with its perilous voyages over unknown rivers and lakes; the midnight attacks of savage aborigines; the sufferings of women and children in their unsheltered homes; the constant dread of foreign invasion; the pillaging of their coasts; the isolation of winter amid the forest; the conflict on the Plains of Abraham and the tragic ending of the two generals in command; the surrender of the fortress; the return of the soldiers to France, and finally the transfer of a brave people with all their property and institutions from the government which they loved and trusted to a government which had forced itself upon them by the arbitrament of war. And yet the change was one of sentiment more than substance. Life and property were no less secure than in the old days of French supremacy. Children played in the street just as they did before Wolfe had planted his guns on the opposite shore. The sisters of the various religious orders pursued their missions of charity without molestation. And yet who would blame the French Canadian if his heart throbbed as he thought that he was no longer a citizen of old France with its traditions, its military glory, its sunny homes. Who would blame if he thought the music from military headquarters was harsh and strident and that the flag that fluttered from the citadel was to him less picturesque than the flag he was wont to see. True, it was the same Quebec to look upon, but that was all. How touching to him the wail of the prophet: "How can I give thee up? How can I let thee go? My heart is turned within me: my repentings are kindled together."

But the Treaty was signed. He was no longer a subject of King Louis. He might return to France if he wished. If he remained, the honour of Great Britain was pledged to protect his life and property and to respect his religion. What more than that under existing circumstances could he expect? Alas! Alas! the cruelty of war.

Now a word here as to the people who became British subjects by the conquest of Canada. They may be divided into four classes: First the military, partly composed of soldiers

from France and partly of the militia of the province; second, the officials of the French government; third, the habitant, who constituted about three-quarters of the population and who was attached to the soil either as an ordinary trader or as a farmer; and fourth, about one thousand, more or less, of English descent and of the Protestant religion. With the capture of Quebec, the French soldiers and officials returned to France. The Canadians that had been enrolled for defensive purposes returned to their homes to follow their ordinary pursuits. There remained, therefore, only those who had a personal interest in the country and who would naturally be expected to adapt themselves, if possible, to their changed conditions, rather than abandon their farms and their homes and return to France. The only two classes to be feared were the soldiers and officials and with their departure British occupation was greatly facilitated.

Notwithstanding these favourable circumstances it could hardly be expected that a people so long accustomed to a system of laws sanctified by the authority and traditions of their forefathers, should at once accept a new system entirely different in its forms and methods of administration. Moreover, they felt that to be barred by their religion from holding positions of trust to which English-speaking citizens were freely admitted was a reflection upon their manhood and their religion at once hateful and degrading. Accordingly they appealed from time to time to the British government for such modifications in the administration of the laws as would relieve them of these disabilities and for the restoration of their ancient privileges under the French régime.

The circumstances under which this appeal was made were peculiarly favourable. In the British colonies to the south, known as the thirteen colonies, the passing of the Stamp Act of 1765 had created much uneasiness. The New England states were particularly active in their hostility to the imposition of taxes in any form by the British government, and in 1773 public resentment expressed itself in the destruction of a cargo of tea in the Boston harbour. And so British statesmen felt that if to the discontent of the thirteen colonies were added the disaffection of the Canadians, the tenure of their newly acquired possessions in Canada would be very precarious. Accordingly a bill was introduced into the British Parliament known as "The Quebec Act," which superseded the military rule then prevailing.

This Act has some significant features deserving special examination. First. It assumed that the Canadians were to be permanent occupants of the country and were entitled

to a share in its administration and so the laws of England, which debarred Roman Catholics from holding any public office because of their religion, were declared inapplicable to Canada—a simple oath of allegiance being substituted for the oath required to be taken by His Majesty's Protestant subjects.

Second. It provided for a council of twenty-three members to assist the Governor-General in administering the public business of the province. This gave the opportunity of recognizing the French Canadians officially, and so the Governor-General called to his assistance eight Roman Catholics—a minority to be sure, but a minority whose opinion had to be respected in all matters of administration.

Third. The French and English languages were to be of equal standing in the debates and published ordinances of the council, a privilege not allowed in any other colony of the Empire.

Fourth. While the laws of England as to criminal matters prevailed throughout the province, the law of France as to civil matters prevailed.

Fifth. Wills and testamentary documents could be executed either according to the law of Canada or according to the forms prescribed by the law of England.

Whether the Quebec Act is viewed as a public declaration that Canadians were to enjoy the largest measure of religious toleration or whether it is viewed as an act of diplomacy to foster their attachment to the British Crown, or whether it is taken as a declaration of partnership deliberately formed between His Majesty and his new subjects for the better government of the country, it is a remarkable historical document. Certainly no Act of the British Parliament affecting one of her colonies ever displayed more foresight and statesmanship, and although it may not be that we owe the permanency of our Canadian possessions to the passing of that Act, it is more than probable that had the British Parliament not adopted the conciliatory spirit towards the Canadians, of which it was the expression, the destiny of Canada might have been completely changed. To lose the loyal attachment of the Canadian clergy and the Canadian habitant was to lose Canada, and were it not for the concessions of the Quebec Act it is more than probable that the French Canadian would have listened to the appeals made by the revolting colonies, rather than submit to laws that deprived him of the ordinary privileges of citizenship.

The Quebec Act was very differently received by the two classes of the population which it affected,—the English and the French Canadians. By the English people it was disapproved because of its concessions to the Roman Catholic religion; and because it permitted the introduction of the civil law of France. In the words of a petition presented to the Lords and Commons from His Majesty's loyal and dutiful and ancient subjects, settled in the Province of Quebec, it was said, "The Quebec Act deprives His Majesty's ancient subjects of all their rights and franchises, destroys the Habeas Corpus Act and the inestimable privilege of trial by jury, the only security against the finality of a corrupt judge, and gave unlimited powers to the Governor-in-Council to alter the criminal laws." By the French Canadian the Act was accepted with the greatest cordiality for the very opposite reasons. It gave him religious equality and the status of citizenship; and these were for the moment all he desired.

In the course of time, however, even the French Canadians became uneasy under its administration. As already stated, out of a council of twenty-three they were represented by only eight of their own race, although the French population was at this time said to amount to about 75,000, while the English speaking population did not exceed 1,000. This disparity of representation, together with the fact that the more important places of trust and influence were held by people of British origin, excited a certain amount of jealousy. Again in the other British provinces of the continent it was known that each province had its own legislature and that the people through their representatives were entrusted with all the powers of a Parliament; and made laws with regard to education, the improvement of highways and other matters, which ordinarily affect an organized community. Then why should they be governed by a council in which a majority of the people had only one-third of the governing power; were they not as capable of self-government as the people of the provinces to the south? On the English-speaking side there were complaints of the opposite character. The French Canadian was too highly favoured by the British government; he was not entitled to any distinctive privileges; he was an ordinary British subject, what more should he ask than the ordinary privileges of a British subject? and the struggle soon became, as Lord Durham said fifty years later, "a struggle not of principles but of races."

But something had to be done. The colonists of both races must be appeased and Mr. Pitt to that end introduced the Constitutional Act of 1791 into the British Parliament,

dividing the British possessions into Upper and Lower Canada. "I hope," he said on doing so, "this separation will put an end to the competition between the old French inhabitants and the new settlers from Britain and the British colonies." The Act of 1791 divided Quebec, as the whole of Canada was then called, into Upper and Lower Canada, conceded a Parliament for each province consisting of a Legislative Council appointed by the Crown and an Assembly elected by the people. It was received with the greatest enthusiasm by the people of Lower Canada—the City of Quebec being illuminated as a mark of public appreciation. Approval was further expressed in the reply of the Assembly to the speech made by His Excellency at the opening of the first Parliament: "We cannot express the emotions which arose in our breasts on that ever memorable day when we entered upon the enjoyment of a constitution assimilated to that form of government which has carried the glory of our mother country to the highest elevation."

In Upper Canada the Constitutional Act was also received with great favour. The population was very small, not exceeding 25,000, composed largely of United Empire Loyalists, who naturally welcomed a constitution that in the words of Governor Simcoe, was declared to be "the very image and transcript of the British Constitution."

Although the Act of 1791 was apparently a deed of separation between the two races, its administration ultimately led to union and co-operation. The partnership begun on the Plains of Abraham and confirmed and expanded by the Quebec Act had lasted only thirty-two years. Would government by disunion be any better? We shall see. The people thought that the Act of 1791 placed the government of the country in their hands. Not so. Both Upper and Lower Canada soon found that the Governor-General and his Ministers did not feel themselves bound to regard the views of the people's representatives or to dispense the patronage of the government with their consent or advice. In Lower Canada this interference led to a rebellion under Papineau, and in Upper Canada under Wm. Lyon MacKenzie.

It was evident then that government by disunion was not the remedy for Canadian ills. Even Pitt, great as was his statesmanship, could make a mistake, and so after an experience of fifty years of the separation of the two races in different parliaments, the British government, on the advice of Lord Durham, passed the Union Act of 1841, whereby the partnership which was all but dissolved in 1791 was re-formed, and once more the representatives of the French Canadians

and His Majesty's ancient subjects, met upon a common ground and in a common Parliament. The essential principles of the Quebec Act were revived.

But here we must pause to consider a most instructive episode in the racial history of Canada. So far I have regarded the Act of 1791 as a nominal dissolution of the partnership between the two races. Happily it was only a nominal dissolution, as the unanimity with which both races joined to repel the American invasion of 1812 amply demonstrated. So soon as war was declared against Great Britain by the United States the Governor-General of Lower Canada called a special session of the Provincial Legislature for the purpose of placing the province in a defensible position. In response to this call, the Assembly, although its annual income only amounted to £75,000 currency, at once passed a bill pledging the credit of the province to the extent of £250,000 for the purpose of defence, and a further sum of £15,000 annually for five years to meet the interest on this indebtedness—the Assembly at the same time assuring His Excellency that, "their attachment and zeal to the religion of their fathers, their loyalty to their Sovereign, and their ardent love for the best interests of the province were such that no threats of the enemy will intimidate them nor will they be deluded by any insidious offers they may make." Immediately the militia of the province was organized for any emergency that might arise. After a series of skirmishes in which the militia of Lower Canada amply justified the confidence placed in them by the Governor-General a decisive battle under Col. de Salabery at Chateauguay fully satisfied the American invaders that the French Canadians were loyal to the British government and were neither wanting in courage nor in military spirit to repel any attack that might be made on their country and their flag.

In Upper Canada similar alacrity was displayed. Although the population of the province did not exceed 75,000 the invaders were defeated wherever they ventured to risk an engagement, and both in her Assembly and in the loyalty of her volunteers Upper Canadians showed, that though separated from their Lower Canadian allies they were one with them in the defence of the country.

But to resume my narrative. The Union Act of 1841, which was a renewal of the old partnership apparently dissolved in 1791, provided that each province should be equally represented in both the Assembly and Legislative Council. Equality was the basis of the re-united races. The united provinces as a partnership assumed the liabilities and indebtedness which the two provinces had incurred before

the union, and a few years after the reunion for the convenience of doing business, either the French or English language could be used in debates or in papers printed for the use of Parliament. The leading departments of the government were represented both by a French Canadian and a British Canadian. There was an Attorney-General East and an Attorney-General West. The Executive government was also recognized in duplicate, as for instance, the Baldwin-Lafontaine, the Hincks-Morin, the MacDonald-Cartier and the Brown-Dorion governments, and later it was assumed to be but a just practice in all matters of legislation (a practice not always followed) that no act specially affecting one province should become law unless approved by a majority of its own representatives, thus giving rise to the term "double majority."

Although the Union Act of 1841 renewed the partnership of the two races, it did not altogether suppress the contentious spirit of early days. Either the field of operations was too limited or the partners were wanting in the spirit of conciliation and self-restraint without which no partnership could be successful. But amid all the contentions which disturbed its labours, the intermingling of the two races in a common Parliament and the better facilities for inter-communication between the people of the two provinces greatly improved their personal and political relations and even when feeling ran highest, so far from suggesting a dissolution of the partnership both parties felt that the Union of 1841, which with all its unrest had resulted so happily for Canada, should be extended rather than dissolved. In this spirit it was proposed to increase the firm originally consisting of two members by the addition of the adjacent provinces that had a common interest with Upper and Lower Canada in developing the trade and commerce of the country. The only question to be settled in the event of such a union was how to preserve an equitable proportion of influence in the new partnership. This was happily adjusted by giving to each province representation in the new Parliament according to population, with a fixed representation in the Senate which could be reasonably depended upon to protect the individual interests of all the provinces, and in order that there might be no quarrel about local matters which concerned individual members of the firm only, it was agreed that such measures should be entirely excluded from the general partnership. To make this agreement binding it was embodied in an Act of the Imperial Parliament and signed by Her Majesty the Queen as the British North America Act of 1867.

It is a far cry from the treaty of capitulation which was made on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 to the present year of grace, 1908, but it is remarkable how the stipulations of that treaty have influenced the course of Canadian history. Ramezay's demand that the French garrison should be permitted to march out of the city which he so honourably surrendered was significant of the resolute manner in which the French race has ever since insisted upon fair recognition in the administration of the country. A race who, in the hour of their direst adversity was able to snatch from the iron grasp of the conqueror the "honours of war" could not fail to be an important factor in the future history of any country. And then, whether we approve or disapprove of the religion they professed, a race who claimed as a condition of "laying down their arms" that they should be allowed the free exercise of their religious convictions is not a race likely to encourage anarchy or flout the authority of constitutional government. A race, too, that has preserved its individuality, its social habits and its language amid all the changes of the centuries has a steadying power, which in this democratic age of change and unrest must prove of incalculable value in promoting the stability of government and suppressing the vapid agitator and the turbulent demagogue. To quote Sir Charles Dilke in his recent book on the British Empire: "The French Canadians are now, under the admirable institutions which in our late born wisdom we have conferred upon them, perhaps the most loyal of all the peoples under the British Crown and they are so in spite of the fact that they have remained intensely French, proud of their race and its history and deeply attached to their tongue and its literature. . . . The double allegiance of the French Canadians of the present day on the one hand to the British Crown and to the liberty which they enjoy under it, and on the other hand not to a foreign power which they regard as foreign, but to their own race and literature, is one of the most interesting spectacles which the world affords."

With this race we have entered into partnership by treaty and by Acts of Parliament. In the long years of that partnership there have been differences of opinion, accentuated more than once by mutual recriminations, but in spite of the lapses of human nature, and it may be of hereditary antipathies, Canada is to-day stronger in her national cohesion and more inevitably committed to pursue her own distinctive destiny whatever it may be, than she would have been were it not for the partnership so happily formed one hundred and fifty years ago on the Plains of Abraham.

And here let me submit two other considerations bearing upon the relations of the French occupation of Canada to the history of North America. First, if the French had not taken possession of Canada when they did and colonized the valley of the St. Lawrence, Canada would no doubt, like other parts of North America, have been occupied by the British. Then would it not naturally follow that when the other British colonies revolted in 1776 that Canada as the fourteenth colony would have also joined them? By a similar process of reasoning, had not Canada become a British possession in 1759 is it not more than probable when Napoleon Bonaparte sold his French possessions in America to the United States in 1803 that Canada as part of these French possessions would also have been bargained away? Are these two circumstances contingent parts of that "divinity which shapes our ends," or merely an hypothesis incapable of proof? At all events the logic of the situation leads to but one conclusion.

Let us next consider the significance of the Plains of Abraham to America. Although it is generally assumed that the passing of the Stamp Act was the cause of the revolt of the thirteen colonies, a closer reading of history shows that the right of self-government conceded to them in their charters from the Crown was the secret spring of that spirit of independence which found expression at Philadelphia in 1774. The Stamp Act was but an excuse to assert their independence in the fullest sense, although they had in fact all the liberty up to that time which it was possible to obtain under any circumstance. But so long as France was in control of Canada to the north and west they felt that to attempt a separation would be to place themselves between two fires. On the Atlantic side British troops could be easily landed, to which resistance would be futile. To the north and west they would be subject to the attack of the French aided no doubt by the Canadians. But by the conquest of Canada the position was materially changed. They argued that now in the event of a revolution, France, instead of aiding Great Britain, would be disposed to revenge the loss of Canada and could be depended upon openly, or secretly at least, for assistance.

Mr. Francis Parkman in his introduction to the "Life of Montcalm and Wolfe" says: "More than one clear eye saw at the middle of the last century that the subjection of Canada would lead to a revolt of the British colonies. So long as an active and enterprising enemy threatened their borders they could not break with the mother country because they needed her help."

Dr. Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton University, in his history of the American people, after discussing the causes which led to the discontent of the American colonies, says: "Now that the French were driven out it was more useless than ever to argue the point. The chief and most obvious reason for feeling dependent upon the mother country was gone. All the British was gone too. The provincial levies raised in the colonies had fought alongside of Canadian troops and had found themselves not a whit less able to stand and fight, not a whit less needed in victory."

Sir George Trevelyan, in his history of the American Revolution, says: "So long as the English colonists had France for their neighbour harrassing them with raids, inciting the Indians to ravage their villages and building forts and block-houses up to the very edge of their frontier and sometimes even within it, they could not afford to dispense with the aid and protection of the mother country. But the French power had been uprooted from America, and England by her own act had destroyed the only check which kept her transatlantic subjects in awe, and if ever from that time forward she ill-treated or offended them they would reply by throwing off their dependence."

If then the judgment of the historians I have quoted is to be taken, the deciding incentive to the independence of the thirteen colonies was the British victory on the Plains of Abraham. Is it possible that to General James Wolfe rather than to General George Washington the American Republic owes its origin, and is it possible that the victory which won for Great Britain her vast Canadian possessions occupying half a continent, lost to her the other half of the continent and that the true shrine for the American is not Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed, not Mount Vernon where the remains of General Washington are entombed, but the heights behind Cape Diamond beneath which the St. Lawrence flows in silent and majestic grandeur? This seems to be the judgment of the historians. If so, how significant to the whole world as well as to America, was the event of September 18th, 1759! Soon the vestal fires of independence kindled by the brilliant achievements of General Wolfe blazed from Maine to Virginia, and soon the world learned that a new nation was born in the Western Hemisphere—a vigorous scion of British stock. With unprecedented energy it began its onward march to power and eminence, and millions from the old world have sought refuge under its sheltering wings. Follow this mighty current of influence and wealth, as we see it to-day, back to its source; back of

its great cities and great railway systems, back of its mountains and rivers, back of Yorktown and Saratoga and Lexington and Bunker Hill, back of the Declaration of Independence, and is it possible that we find its source on that sacred spot where Wolfe fell and Ramezay handed the keys of Quebec to his victorious successors? Is this history or is it romance? If history it gives additional significance to my argument, if romance we need not refer to Walter Scott or Victor Hugo for a more fascinating tale.

Then what about the significance of the contest on the Plains of Abraham to Great Britain. First, it revealed to her in a most conclusive manner the advantage of naval supremacy. When Admiral Saunders, with 277 ships of the line and 60,000 soldiers, set sail for America for the conquest of Canada it was evident to the whole world that without the command of the sea no nation need aspire to universal sovereignty. And since that day, although occasionally disputed, her naval pre-eminence has been honourably maintained and Nelson and Trafalgar have become more than a rhetorical expression. Is there not a lesson to Canada in this overmastering circumstance?

Second. The taking of Quebec practically laid the foundation of her Colonial Empire. Except a slender foot-hold in India, the British possessions elsewhere were comparatively insignificant. Australia and New Zealand, although discovered, had no appreciable value except as a shelter from offended justice. She owned a few of the West Indies Islands and Prince Rupert's Land in North America, and seemed to be satisfied. But with the possession of Quebec the idea of a Colonial Empire fastened itself upon British statesmen, and from that date forward, whenever new territory could be obtained or minor possessions enlarged, she pushed her conquests as well as her commerce, until now she occupies one-quarter of the habitable globe. Had she failed in the conquest of Canada who can tell what would have been the effect upon her aspirations and her territorial expansion.

Third. It was not enough for Great Britain that she should command the commerce of the Seven seas nor that she should extend her colonial possessions, but it was vital that in the councils of Europe her prestige should be maintained. Prussia was asserting herself under Frederick the Great, Austria had undoubted influence as one of the greatest powers of Central Europe, Russia was emerging from the obscurity of centuries and Spain was still a force to be reckoned with. Outside the continent of Europe she had little to fear be-

cause of her power at sea, but to maintain her rank among her sister nations, she could not afford to be baffled either in diplomacy or in war. Had the campaign against Canada failed, her reputation as a war power would have been greatly damaged, and Pitt, the Great Commoner, who was then at the head of the War Department, would have failed in maintaining his authority in the councils of Europe. What were the many millions which he spent in the conquest of Canada, compared to the prestige and the distinction, which it conferred upon British statesmen, and the dread with which it invested her army and navy?

And lastly, the acquisition of French Canada gave to Great Britain a frontal entrance to her western possessions in North America. What would the great Northwest be worth to Canada to-day if a foreign country intervened between it and the Atlantic Ocean? Accessible directly only by Hudson Bay, it would be isolated from the world, except for a few months each year. The great waterways reaching half across the continent would be under foreign control, and the prairies of the West would be as isolated as Central Africa. To acquire Canada was to connect the east and the west, and to lay the foundation for that Canadian Empire which so happily responds to the impulses of nationhood and is already so rich in promise and so commanding in its possibilities.

And now having endeavored to interpret the significance of the events to which I have called your attention, let me ask you if it is not a fitting thing that we should rejoice in the memories they awaken and the national consequences to which they gave birth. The founding of Quebec brings us back three centuries—back to the days of the earliest explorations of North America—to the days when European civilization first laid its hand upon the new world. What a plunge into the past. Earlier than the commonwealth. Earlier than the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers. Who would not rejoice in the ancient lineage of this sacred spot—sacred to the first throbbings of a new nation—sacred to the memory of the old regime—of Frontenac and Laval—and sacred alike to those of later days, to Dorchester and Durham and the Fathers of Confederation. Fill up its history as you may, with all the modern innovations in architecture and transportation so familiar in other cities, yet Quebec still stands with the tracery of the olden days on every feature, and the legends of the old regime on every page of its history. Quaint, old city, the dearest link in our connection with the past as well as the historical centre of all that modern civilization has done for British America.

And we celebrate the battle of the Plains of Abraham not because of the sovereignty which it transferred, but because of the sovereignty which it founded and developed. What was the triumphant march of Wolfe to the triumphant march of liberty, and toleration and statesmanship which followed in its wake? In the ordeal of battle many of the noblest qualities of the human race are called into exercise, but it is only by the arts of peace, that a nation can reach its highest altitude, and the progress of humanity its greatest development. Who, in the light of history, regrets the battle of the Plains of Abraham, and who, that loves free speech in every tongue, a free conscience under every creed, and liberty under every social condition, would have it otherwise?

To the French Canadian the celebration on the Plains of Abraham may suggest some saddening reflections, and the words of Whittier may cross his mind:

"Of all the sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest of all is—it might have been."

And are not these "sad words" the greatest riddle in the history of nations as well as individuals? What might have been? Ask this question over the ruins of Babylon and Tyre and Carthage; ask it as you read the history of Greece and Rome; ask it at Thermopylae, at Bannockburn, at Waterloo; ask it of Marlborough, of Nelson, of Wellington; all are silent. There is no response. Behind what human eyes can see and human reason explain is there not some mysterious power by which all things are determined and whose purposes we can neither vary nor comprehend. Happy are they who in the crash of their dearest expectations can rise on "stepping stones of their dead selves, to higher things."

But hark! There is booming of cannon. The celebration has already begun. You look eastward, and on the shimmering waters of the St. Lawrence you behold a long procession of moving forms shrouded in smoke and pulsating as though stirred by some terrible passion. Look! What flag is that which flutters from the foretop of the great monster now leading the procession? I see it! Huzza! Who would not cheer that meteor flag of a thousand years? One hundred and fifty years ago it was seen where it now floats but with different feelings. And are the sailors whom you see on deck the same breed of men who fought at Trafalgar and the Baltic and the coasts of Spain, and are they looking for some enemy to encounter? Peace, there is no enemy to-day, and it is well. These monsters of the sea

on which you are gazing are not seeking for prey; they bear no message of death; on the contrary their guns ring out as joy-bells ring at Christmastide. But stop. Is that the fleur-de-lis of France that I see moving so gracefully to take its place abreast of the royal flag of England? Well done. That flag fluttered in these waters 300 years ago when this proud city of Quebec was born. Welcome dear old fleur-de-lis, welcome the flag of France. But what is that new flag that looms upon the horizon spangled with stars and fluttering in all the vigour of its young life? Unknown to Wolfe, unknown to Montcalm, what is it doing here? Ah! We know it well, it is the flag of the United States. Why should it not be here? To the day we celebrate it owes its origin.

What a procession! Steel-clad, stately, terrible.. Your thoughts go back involuntarily one hundred and fifty years when another procession, sea-winged, silently threaded its way in the same direction; upon its decks the hope of England's great war minister, and in its cabin, weakened with fever and apparently overcome with his responsibility, the hero of the hour lay murmuring to himself, as if anticipating his fate, "the path of glory leads but to the grave." But these thoughts pass away in a moment. The cannon is booming. Boom! Boom! till the very earth beneath your feet is trembling as if in fear. How these sea-monsters exult in their power and with what delight they proclaim their message of good-will to Canada. Was there ever such congratulations from adamant lips—was there ever such salutations from three nations to the spirits of the mighty dead—was there ever such a trilogy on land or sea?

Young scion of the northern zone in whose veins are intermingled Saxon and Norman blood, these salutations are for you. France, under whose lovely eyes you first saw the light, England, who folded you in her strong arms and lavished upon you her choicest gifts, America, who claims with you a common birthplace rejoice to-day in the vigour of your early manhood and the gilded sky of your rising expectations. And their prayer to the God of nations is, that the heroism which has made the names of Montcalm and Wolfe so dear to the whole world may characterize your sons to remotest generations and that the partnership of two races first made on the Plains of Abraham and since confirmed by Treaties and Acts of Parliament, may contribute to the stability of your institutions and the prosperity of your people "while circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

Not once or twice in our rough island story,
The path of duty was the way to glory.

